It must be added that local institutions varied markedly in the different areas of China. Few descriptions can be written which prove valid for the entire country.

Then, too, the "local gentry/[7] as foreigners sometimes called them, were very influential. Scholars, retired officials, men of wealth, the elders of the leading clans, were much listened to in local affairs and exercised a good deal of initiative in matters affecting the welfare of the community.

In addition to the family, the guild, the secret society, the village, and the local gentry, there were many other local organizations that took over some of the functions which in some countries in the Occident are performed by the government. Among these were volunteer fire companies, benevolent societies, groups for watching the crops, and associations for mutual aid. The Chinese have a great capacity and zeal for organization. This has been displayed in scores of ways and has helped to render them, in their local affairs, self-managing with the minimum of interference from above. It must be added, however, that repeatedly they were and are hampered by reciprocal distrust and by incapacity for administration. Often individuals, groups, and classes display a distressing lack of ability or willingness to cooperate.

LAWS AND COURTS

What in the West is called law was much of it in China a matter of tradition and custom. Thanks largely to the common basis of culture insured by the civil service examinations, certain ethical principles were recognized as authoritative throughout the land. This, indeed, was in accordance with the dominant Confucian theory. Life and conduct were supposed to be governed by universally valid principles. These were included, in

general, under what the Chinese denominated *li* (not the same character as that employed for ceremonies). Originally quite possibly employed to designate the manners and customs of the aristocracy, in the course of the centuries *li* came to be regarded as binding on all civilized mankind. It was conceived of as conforming to the will of Heaven and was akin to although not identical with the concept of natural law which was present in the Grseco-Roman world and has been transmitted to the modern Occident. In addition, each local unit had its customs. Enforcement of *li* and local customs